

VZCZCXYZ0025  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNC #0536/01 1011517  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 111517Z APR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5839  
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4608  
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY 3555  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1166  
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA PRIORITY 0448  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0521  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L NICOSIA 000536

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2021

TAGS: PREL PGOV CY

SUBJECT: GETTING OUR MESSAGE THROUGH TO THE GREEK CYPRIOT MEDIA, WITHOUT CHANGING OUR POLICY

REF: A. EMAIL INGMANSON-MILLER 4/7/06  
B. NICOSIA 1585 (2005)

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD L. SCHLICHER; REASONS

1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Greek Cypriot media is consistent to the point of Pavlovian response. Certain phrases -- even particular words -- in the mouth of a U.S. official will elicit very predictable results. Our Cyprus policy is the right one, but we need to tweak our public diplomacy message in ways that open ears and minds on both sides of the island.

Getting the message right entails careful handling of the most emotive issues. For example, the most emotionally-charged phrases in our Cyprus vocabulary are, without a doubt, "the Annan Plan" and any of the phrases we use to modify it, including: "uniquely balanced," "fair," and "workable." No Greek Cypriots, even those who voted "yes" on the plan, believe it had these attributes. Our statements on the Annan Plan, when we must use the phrase at all, should steer between the G/C desire to never hear the phrase and the T/C desire to freeze it in amber; this can be done by expressing strong support for the UN role, while noting that both sides actually recognize the need to take advantage of the decades of work the UN has done between the parties. Whenever possible, post recommends that we frame our policy statements to look forward rather than backward, and work assiduously to minimize specific references to the Annan Plan by name. Other affirmative choices that we could make in pursuing our public diplomacy agenda could include moderating the concept of "lifting Turkish Cypriot isolation" (fighting words for Greek Cypriots who see it as a euphemism for "creeping recognition" of the "TRNC") with "expanding economic opportunities for Turkish Cypriots to help integrate the two communities in a bizonal, bicomunal federation." (much harder to argue against). END SUMMARY.

Greek Cypriot Press Environment

---

¶2. (C) The Cypriot press environment can be understood as too many newspapers chasing a single story -- the Cyprus issue. The most widely read newspapers tend to follow the lead of the government, with indirect influence from the Presidential Palace. Most of the media obsequiously toes the government line to the extent that the largest newspaper, Phileleftheros, refused to place a USAID advertisement. Given the effective government control of the press and a populace inclined to believe the official line, President Papadopoulos's often crude or obvious attempts at media manipulation are surprisingly successful. Almost paradoxically, Papadopoulos is enjoying strong support for

his handling of the Cyprus issue even though people do not believe that they are closer to a solution or that the political situation has improved. Much of this seemingly schizophrenic behavior can be attributed to the pro-government catechism that passes for journalism in Cyprus.

¶3. (C) In addition to ROC sources, statements from U.S. or Turkish officials are guaranteed page one material. Stories in Turkish and Turkish Cypriot papers are often picked up in the south the next day and vice versa. Turkish Cypriot "officials" in particular often react to the media spin on statements rather than to the actual statements themselves, as witnessed by the controversy over the joint communique between President Papadopoulos and Secretary General Annan. Because the Cyprus issue fuels the media industry here, with many journalists focusing exclusively in this area, U.S. officials, statements are parsed very carefully with journalists filling in gaps and searching for a significance that was not necessarily intended by the speaker. For us, neutral (or even factual) coverage is a victory. Positive press coverage is rare and usually attributable to statements that can be seen as somehow critical of Turkey.

#### What Works

-----

¶4. (C) Many in the Greek Cypriot media and the public have been pleasantly surprised by recent statements from U.S. officials that they see as more nuanced and forward-looking on the Cyprus issue. FM Iacovou told the Ambassador on April 7 that this "change" in tone had been both noticed and appreciated. The following are some sound bites which state our policy and resonate well with the Greek Cypriot media.

¶A. "Bizonal, bicomunal federation solution supported by majorities of both sides"

-- Leadership on both sides has supported this idea since 1977. It is mother's milk and spinach pie (so to speak) but worth reaffirming nonetheless. Here we note that the "supported by majorities on both sides" language is heard on the G/C side as recognition of their contention that substantial changes to the Annan Plan will have to be negotiated. We also note that the concept of a bizonal, bicomunal federation may be losing support among the populace, particularly among young people. A poll published last week indicated a drop from 67% of Greek Cypriots supporting the idea of living together with Turkish Cypriots two years ago to only 45% supporting this idea today.

¶B. "Policy of reunification (not separation)"

-- Emphasizing this point counters suspicions on the Greek Cypriot side that the U.S. could recognize the "TRNC" at some point if Greek Cypriots do not yield to outside pressure in accepting the Annan Plan with marginal changes.

¶C. "We do not recognize the TRNC; Talat viewed by the U.S. not as president but as leader of Turkish Cypriot community"

-- Talat's meeting with the Secretary in Washington, the U.S. Ambassador's meetings with Talat at the "Presidential Office," the visits of U.S. Congressmen to the north via Ercan, and U.S. efforts to get the UNSC to endorse the Annan Plan were seen as steps towards creeping recognition of the north and a deliberate attempt to "punish" the Greek Cypriot side for rejecting the Annan Plan. Recent statements by U.S. officials emphasizing that we do not and will not recognize the "TRNC" have received widespread, favorable press coverage in the G/C community, without costing us appreciably in the T/C community.

¶D. "Solution based on democratic principles; acceptance of previous "No" vote by Greek Cypriots"

-- Statements that make clear we understand that the Greek Cypriot side did not find the Annan Plan to be an adequate

solution play exceptionally well in the south. This is particularly true if accompanied by a statement recognizing that there will need to be changes to the plan if it is to be made acceptable to both sides. Greek Cypriots fear being pressured to swallow a "new" plan that includes only a few cosmetic changes.

E. "Need to move forward"

-- Statements that, regardless of what happened in 2004, all sides need to be forward-looking and engage in serious discussions that will lead to a solution are well received. We have noticed positive press coverage when U.S. officials urge both sides to sit down with the UN to determine the process that will enable the leaders to have substantive negotiations leading to a final product to be approved by both communities.

F. "Up to the Cypriots themselves to solve the problem"

-- Turkey's role in the Cyprus issue continues to grate on Greek Cypriot nerves. This line works for us to the extent that Greek Cypriots understand it as meaning that Turkey's role in a United Cyprus will be minimized. It is less well received if it is spun as an attempt to help Turkey slough off its responsibilities to the ROC.

G. "Work for a settlement which will benefit everyone"

-- GCs fear our sole interest in the Cyprus issue is helping Turkey advance smoothly on its EU course. It is important to explain why a solution is in everyone's interest, including that of Cyprus and Greece.

H. "Turkey needs to fulfill its European obligations"

-- Recognizing and rebutting this central GC concern is always a public affairs positive for us.

What does NOT work

-----

I. (C) Statements that hark back to the traumatic times of the referenda on the Annan Plan only inflame public opinion on the Greek Cypriot side. It is difficult to overemphasize how radioactive the term "Annan Plan" has become in the south. Politicians would rather be known as embezzlers or tax cheats than supporters of the Annan Plan. The media itself has become more polarized as reporters who supported the Annan Plan have left pro-government Phileleftheros and detractors have left pro-settlement Politis. Mentioning the Annan Plan distracts attention from the issue of a forward looking settlement. The media is stocked with Cyprus "experts" -- self-appointed guardians of the "true facts" -- who weigh every word and compare it to our spokespersons, statements over the past several years. Because of this, the messages on Cyprus coming out of Washington, Nicosia, Ankara, and Athens have to be clear and consistent. When different U.S. officials are quoted by the Greek Cypriot media as saying contradictory things about the same issue, it is viewed as proof that the U.S. is disengaged or insincere.

I.A. "The "A" word - Specific mention of the Annan Plan"

-- Mention of the Annan Plan by name simply causes Greek Cypriots to tune out on our specific points. The plan has been demonized by the present government, and polls indicate that if put to referendum again, an even higher percentage of Greek Cypriots - over 80% according to recent polls - would reject the plan. This said, we can get our message through to both sides by expressing strong support for the UN's negotiating role, while noting that each side has a strong interest in taking advantage of the decades of work the UN has done between the parties, which in fact has resulted in agreement on many issues (which agreement was embodied in the Annan Plan). In addition to this general message, we can tweak our comments on various common descriptors of the Annan

Plan.

IB. "The Annan Plan was fair and balanced" or, even worse, "uniquely balanced"

-- Even the vast majority of those who voted in favor of the plan do not share this position. The media and public perceived the plan and the U.S. motivations to support it as pro-Turkish. Papadopoulos regularly slams this view publicly and is clear against whom his ire is directed.

IC. "The Greek Cypriot side is responsible for the lack of progress since 2004"

-- Insistence on the ball being in the Greek Cypriot court is not helpful. This is not a tennis match. This metaphor only reinforces the GOC's position that the U.S. favors Turkish Cypriots. Many point out that the UNSYG agrees with President Papadopoulos, position that any negotiations should be prepared carefully.

ID. "By accepting the Annan Plan, the Turkish side is now absolved of its responsibilities on the Cyprus issue"

-- Greek Cypriots believe that it was very easy for the Turkish Cypriot side to accept the plan since they see it as pro-Turkish. Voting "yes" in 2004 was, therefore, not a noteworthy accomplishment, but rather further proof that the plan itself was unbalanced.

IE. "Turkish Cypriots are pro-solution since they voted for the Annan Plan"

-- This type of statement implies that Greek Cypriots are anti-solution. Greek Cypriots reject this position outright because they have been saying all along that their "no" was not against a solution in principle, but against the Annan Plan in the specific.

IF. "The Greek Cypriot side should put its objections on the table before new negotiations can begin"

-- The majority of Greek Cypriot media outlets argue that this should happen only when negotiations resume. In addition (albeit in seeming contradiction), most people believe Papadopoulos when he says that his special envoy, Ambassador Tzionis, has already presented the Greek Cypriot's objections to UNSYG Annan.

IG. Support for "Direct Aid, Direct Trade, and Direct flights"

-- Support for direct engagement with "TRNC" officials and institutions is understood as part of our campaign to punish the Greek Cypriots for their "no" to the Annan Plan. The general belief is that our goal is to upgrade the status of the Turkish Cypriot state rather than promote a settlement. Moreover, the concept of direct trade is something of a misnomer and is often understood as meaning non-stop flights and shipping routes between the U.S. and the north. We strongly suggest that the word "direct" not be used when discussing trade between U.S. and Turkish Cypriot business people. The fundamental trade questions have more to do with tax status and customs duties than docking privileges. It would be more effective for us to focus on a goal of "increasing trade opportunities" with the Turkish Cypriots rather than promoting "direct trade."

Adjusting our message

-----

I6. (C) Our policy on the Cyprus issue is in the right place, but the specific language we have been using may not be helping us achieve our goals. Solving the Cyprus problem will require majority support for a specific solution from both communities. The language we use should reflect that

reality and advance our objectives. Our most effective core message, which states our policy while avoiding most sensitivities among both the G/C and T/C communities, would be something along the following lines:

-- The United States strongly supports a fair and workable settlement of the Cyprus problem that reunites the island and promotes reconciliation of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities within the framework of a bizonal, bicommunal federation.

-- We strongly support UNFICYP, the UN SRSG and the UNSYG's mission of good offices. The central UN role in pursuing a Cyprus settlement is vital and indispensable.

-- The United States stands ready to do everything we can to support the parties in reaching agreement acceptable to majorities in both communities. The ultimate responsibility for solving this problem, however, lies with Cypriots -- not the U.S., the EU, the UN, or any other third parties. A settlement would benefit everyone, but first and foremost it would benefit Cypriots.

-- We need to move forward and work with the two parties and the UN to re-start serious negotiations on a settlement.

-- The technical talks process is an important step in this direction. It has our full support and we encourage the parties to do everything they can to ensure that this process succeeds.

-- Meanwhile, we will continue our efforts to expand economic opportunities for the Turkish Cypriots, including through enhanced opportunities for trade. It is our belief that doing this will further the cause of a settlement, including by helping reduce the costs of reunification, and make it easier to integrate the two communities in a viable bizonal, bicommunal federation.

SCHLICHER